

REM

Night sounds of the Karoo: crickets, bats, occasional gusts of wind, an owl calling. Onto an uneven stone or concrete structure, or the exterior of a building, is projected a figure moving in dreamlike slow motion, as if weightless, treading on air. It is the figure of a woman, a ritual huntress, a Venus of Willendorf - changing her position and shape while all around her other creatures slowly appear and then dissolve again into darkness. Other human figures become visible: half-distorted, blurring away and re-appearing. These figures go through familiar motions: walking, meeting, fighting, moving objects around. The image resembles a Bushman rock painting: a tableau of human and animal figures and various objects engaging in a flow of relationships: the hunter and the hunted, the shaman and the devotees, adversaries in combat, the arrival of Europeans in their awkward cattle-drawn wagons. Despite their hallucinatory appearance, some images also seem strangely contemporary: scenes of modern warfare appear, present-day vehicles move about, people engaging in familiar late twentieth century actions. On the projection surface, all the different images appear as dream-objects in a landscape of apprehensive expectation. Throughout, the central figure performs her slow, rolling, trancelike dance, asleep and dreaming.

REM (rapid eye movement) is a physiological state during sleep most associated with dreaming. The blood flow to the brain increases, breathing and heartbeats become irregular, the hands and face start to twitch and voluntary muscle controls are lost. REM Sleep is often called the 'Dream State'. This is the most active state of the sleep process. REM dreams are vivid, filled with physical and emotional energy. During this time the mind is at its most active as the subconscious deals with all the information, memories, neuroses, fears and emotions archived during wakefulness. Some scientists refer to REM as a third level of consciousness that allows us to relive life experiences.

The figure is that of the artist, filmed while asleep. The phases where she was the most restless were selected, edited together and made to play in slow motion. All around her, images of historical and contemporary Southern Africa unfold: taken from post cards, newspapers and books, historical, geographical and political images of the last century: a hundred years of great change. The work engages the hopes and fears of those who have lived through the turmoil of an infamous history and now have to find the best possible future. It refers to the Aboriginal Dream Time, a time suspended between yesterday and forever - but projects this into a much anticipated and imagined tomorrow (the 21st Century).

REM can also be seen as a warning or omen communicated through a dream against the hubris of nations turning away from history in myopic negation. Therefore it is also a call for calm reflection and deliberation. REM questions our perception of reality and whether our actions sometimes take their cue from a primordial unconscious rather than from waking consciousness. On a bigger scale, the figure represents that of the earth itself: a life in free fall, a fertile body full of dormant and diverse potential, entering an uncertain age, spiraling into an unknown destiny.

Winter Solstice

I

On this longest night of the year,
I am thought's hermaphrodite,
half present, half dreamt.
In this unreal world, all windows dissolve.
Sleep flounders between two stars:
orphaned halves of a press-stud.
Not knowing myself distresses the shadows of leaves.
I have admitted to my faults,
and still I am astonished to find myself sad!
Obsessed with truth, my heart
wrestles to conquer its cage.
To the south, an accumulating storm
accepts itself in spasms.
Content with duality, wood-owls confer:
Who? You.
Who? You.

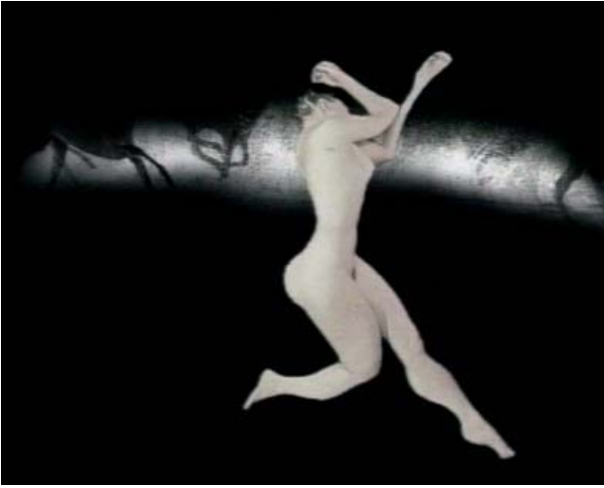
II

Discovered by cold, I am
restless beneath these layers of rational wool.
Rhomboids of insomniac light are frozen to the walls.
Out in the real world, the wind is all bluster and muscle:
my every half-awakening dream is torn
by the shriek of a loosened latch.
On this the longest night of the year,
the lumbar ache of loneliness is as integral to my being
as tinnitus is to hearing.
Eventually I rise, and pacify the latch.
In our mutual nudity, a streetlight laughs aloud.
Serene as a child in the traffic of her dreams,
the intuitive moon negotiates clouds.

III

At Newgrange, four thousand years gone, shamans,
astrologers, shaggy warriors, slaves, wrestled
massive boulders into place, built a tunnel,
a chamber, laid out chiefs' ashes, and nestled
Beneath a mound their reverence, that acceptable dread.
Four thousand years on, this one winter dawn,
the sun still spikes the dark, horizon to tomb,
and gilds again the ethereal scabbards of the dead.
And here, the same sun, this identical dawn, tips
over the trees, lances through an airbrick, lights
roofbeam after beam, without shame, like a blade.

© Dan Wylie, Zimbabwean-born writer and poet.
This poem was written between 1990 and 1995
(exact date not available).



REM

2001

video animation · dimensions: variable · duration: 7 minutes, 18 seconds · looped indefinitely



REM

2001

Installation view at the Museum of Art, Lucerne, Switzerland, 2004

digital video · dimensions: variable · duration: 7 minutes, 18 seconds · looped



REM

2001

Installation view in the Cango Caves, Oudtshoorn, South Africa, 2005

digital video · dimensions: variable · duration: 7 minutes, 18 seconds · looped